



Dr. William L. Roper will take the helm of the nation's top public health organization March 1. He says he expects some of his decisions will receive little applause. Among other things, he plans to work for a totally smoke-free America, lower infant mortality rates and reduced drug abuse.

PHOTOGRAPHY/TOM SMART

New health chief expects some heat

■ **Controversy:** Roper will fight smoking, illnesses — and his opponents — at the CDC.

By JoAnn Jacobsen-Wells
Deseret News medical writer

WASHINGTON — When Dr. William L. Roper says his goal is to "stop smoking entirely in America," expect the air to clear — and the heat to rise.

Also expect the soft-spoken White House adviser to stand firm.

Roper will be no stranger to controversy and opposition when he takes the helm March 1 of the national Centers for Disease Control — the world's pre-eminent public health organization.

"I am sure there are going to be some decisions I make at CDC that are not going to be applauded by everybody," Roper said in a recent Deseret News interview in his White House office. "I didn't take this job on — or any other job — to get applause. I took the job to try to do the right thing."

The CDC post is the latest of many prestigious posts for the 41-year-old physician/administrator, who succeeds Dr. James O. Mason at the Atlanta-based agency. Mason, former director of the Utah Department of Health, left the agency early last year to become assistant secretary of public health service in the Department of Health and Human Services.

Roper, too, was a former health officer of the Jefferson County Department of Health in Birmingham, Ala., before first serving the White House from 1963-86, where as a special assistant to the president he formulated and directed the nation's health policies.

His current major challenge came in 1980 when he ran the health care financing reform commission, which administers Medicare and Medicaid. He is now senior advisor at the agency. Roper anticipates some controversy at the agency.

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